

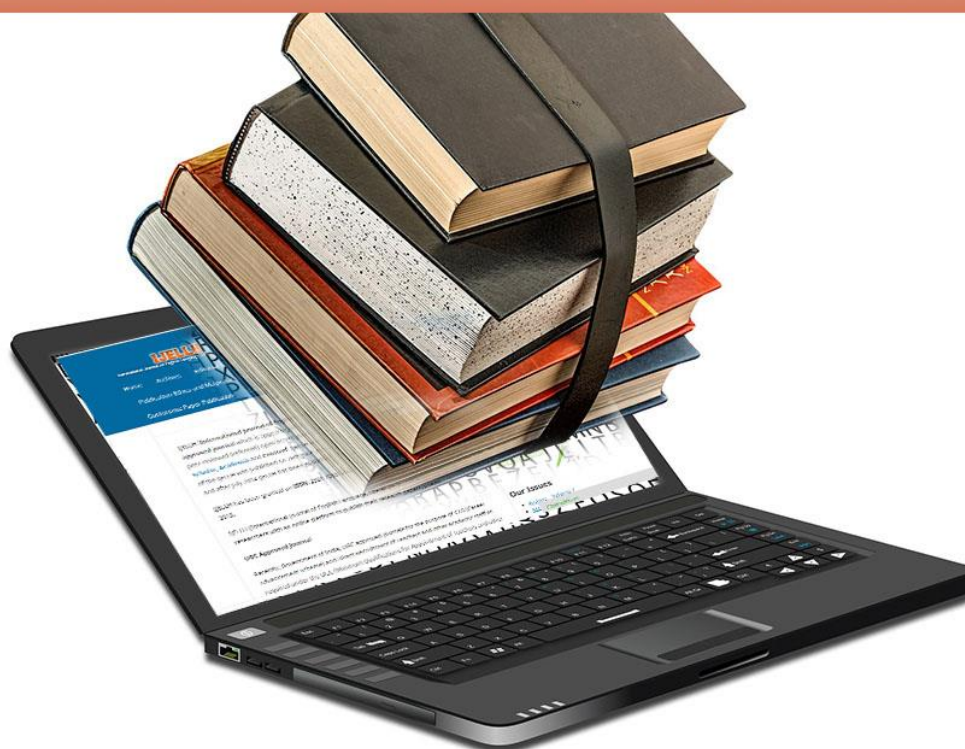
ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019

www.ijellh.com

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Enhancement of English communicative competency of Vocational Higher Secondary
students of the State of Kerala - by Designing ESP curriculum

Abstract

English for Specific Purpose as a methodology in ESL/EFL context aims at imparting specific language needs for ESL/EFL learners. This paper discusses the role of English for Vocational Higher Secondary students to get job opportunities and problematizing the context and seeks suggestions for their better performance in English speaking skill. It also addresses need for redefining the syllabus of Vocational Higher Secondary course in Kerala for keeping the course successful. Vocational Higher Secondary courses are one of the useful job oriented course in the state of Kerala. Recent studies reveal that little importance has been given for language proficiency in the curriculum. This study suggests some important principles for investigating learners needs. Modelling on a revised syllabus based on English for Specific

Purpose (ESP), it suggests how can an ESP syllabus help the learner to satisfy his needs of English learning for communication.

Keywords: Communicative competency, job oriented, learners needs, ESP curriculum.

1. Introduction

Kerala is the most literate state among the states of India. It's contribution to the area of education is praiseworthy. It is one of the states where lowest drop outs and highest literacy rates in education is reported.

Vocational Higher Secondary Education was implemented in 1983. Vocationalisation of education was a transitional period in the history of education in the state of Kerala. It is with a vision that the main target of education is not only behavioral changes in a person but enables one for an adequate job in industry, business, government and other sectors. Vocational education also enables one for self-employment. The main objective of Vocational Course is in enhancing job opportunities for those who pursue higher education. it prepares students for occupation. "Vocational education programs have made a real difference in the lives of countless young people nationwide; they build self-confidence and leadership skills by allowing students to utilize their unique gifts and talents' (Conrad Burns)

The admission to VHSE is based on the merit obtained in SSLC exam. There are 389 VHSE schools in Kerala. There are many job oriented courses offered by VHSE like Agriculture, Dental Technology, Marine technology, Physiotherapy etc. Technically skilled manpower is in great demand whole over the world.

The statistics shows that Kerala produces thousands of professional diploma holders and professional degree holders every year. They have to compete with other job seekers in the job market. Global Job market seeks not only professionally qualified candidates but they require professionals with commending communicative skill in English. English has become

the contemporary lingua franca to connect whole world in terms of language. Hence mastering this language is the need of the hour. Our students are well qualified and competent in their profession. But their poor performance in English speaking skill takes their golden job opportunities. Survey result read in the Hindustan Times newspaper on English communicative competency reveals poor performance of our engineering students in English. The survey was conducted in 2015 by Aspiring Minds, an Employability and Certification company found that 97 % of Indian Engineers cannot speak English, which is a barrier in getting score in interview and 51% of them are not employed based on their spoken English score. This survey result is almost true about Vocational Higher Secondary students. We spend years and years in classrooms and come out without a skill which can support our career. “We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation -rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing.” (Emerson, R. W. (1978))

This paper analyses the main problems for the poor performance of communicative skill of Vocational Higher Secondary students of Kerala state to compete with global job market and suggestions to improve present situation.

2. Course structure and syllabus of Vocational course of Kerala state

Directorate of Vocational Higher Secondary Education offers two years' Vocational Courses in 389 schools with 1100 batches. The duration of the course is for two years. Strength of a class is 60 students. English is a common language for them. They use the same text book used by Higher Secondary course. The purpose of text book is to prepare to meet all four skills of the learner. The text is somewhat matching with the general needs of higher secondary students. They are trained to learn English through literary – tradition. It is an irony that the same text book prescribed for Higher Secondary students is also offered for Vocational Higher

Secondary courses. Higher Secondary students use English textbook as a common language text book. But as far as Vocational Higher Secondary students are concerned their target of language is to enable them to practically use it in their workplace. The preface of English text book says the book is aimed at enriching learner's aesthetic appreciation.

There are two text books offered for the students. Part 1 for First Year and Part 2 for Second Year. Directorate for Higher Secondary Education and Vocational Higher Secondary Education offer the same text books for both Higher Secondary students and Vocational Higher Secondary students.

This paper evaluates the textbooks prescribed for Kerala Vocational Higher Secondary Education. There are Six Units for First Year and Five Units for Second Year. Here I take First Unit of both First Year and Second Year course for convenience to evaluate whether it meets the language requirements of the learners or not.

The contents of *First Year* English text book offered for Vocational Higher Secondary (First Unit)

	Title	Genre	Author
Unit 1	His first flight.	Story	Liam O' Flaherty
	I will fly	Speech	Dr. A.P.J.Abdul Kalam
	Quest for a Theory of Everything	Profile	Kitty Gail Ferguson
	If	Poem	Rudyard Kipling

The contents of *Second Year* English text book offered for Vocational Higher Secondary (First Unit)

	Title	Genre	Author
Unit 1	The 3 Ls of Empowerment	Speech	Christine Lagarde
	Any Woman	Poem	Katherine Tynan
	Matchbox	Story	Ashapura Debi
	Horegallu	Anecdote	Sudha Murthy

The analyses of the texts both for First year and Second Year Vocational Higher Secondary courses explicitly proves that the text caters the surface level need of the learners. Here we need to think about the purpose of learning a language and its context. The educational board needs to discuss the real needs of the professionally qualifying Vocational Higher Secondary students. Detailed analysis of the textbooks reveals that Vocational Higher Secondary students will complete their course without any benefits from the English language course

3. Place of English in Vocational Higher Secondary Course in Kerala

The objective of English teaching in Vocational Higher Secondary Course is to cater the emotional and intellectual growth of the learner and the harmonious growth of the learner's

personality. In Vocational Higher Secondary Course equal weightage is not given to English. Teacher as well as student looks at it not on par with other Vocational subjects. Actually learners main concern is about their vocational subjects. Timetable allots seven hours for English in a week. Speaking skill regarding their professional needs and Listening skills are very important for them. These skills are not tested properly.

4. Perception of English Teacher towards teaching English in Vocational Higher Secondary Courses

Normally English teacher means teacher for General English. Here the learner is doing a professional course. Here the learner's target of language acquisition is different. They want to get the application level of language for their job. They need not train them to memorize language. They have to use it. They have to market them with the help of the language. But teacher appointed is not well trained to that end. Content based teaching English cannot satisfy the needs of Vocational Higher Secondary students. A conventional syllabus, based on literary tradition cannot bring ample opportunities in the class rooms for practicing language. Teaching essay, poem, article, story followed by a number of comprehensive questions to find answer from the text, caters only reading skill. This syllabus prepare them for the exam. Target of English learning becomes exam oriented. Listening and speaking skills find no room for practice. Moreover learners are more serious about their content subjects than English. They read story, poem, essay and answer the questions at the time of exam. Professional skill is not the end of English teaching either for the learner or for the teacher with current syllabus for Vocational Higher Secondary Education

5. Suggestions to improve the present situation of Language Teaching atmosphere.

This paper examined the problems existing in teaching English resulting poor performance of English speaking skill of Vocational Higher Secondary students. The following areas need to be redefined in order to improve the communicative competency. English teaching based on English for Specific Purpose (ESP) in professional classrooms has proved far better than the conventional method of teaching, like general English classroom. The following things need to be validated for framing a revised syllabus for Vocational Higher Secondary courses in Kerala.

- a. Revise VHSE syllabus based on ESP (English for Specific Purpose)
- b. Needs Analysis
- c. Methodology and Course Design as per the need of the learner
- d. Need of ESP expert as English teacher

6. English for Specific Purpose (ESP)

“ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to teaching content and teaching method are based on learner’s reason for learning” Hutchinson and Waters (1987.p.19) Actually ESP is not a product, it is an approach. Here we need to think about more appropriate syllabus for the need of the learner. In Vocational Higher Secondary the conventional classroom is focusing on content rather than the need of the learner. Its aim is not to produce poetry, article or plays to satisfy the aesthetic appreciation of all learners. Teacher needs to know what is the need of the learner. Hutchinson and Waters (p.18) “Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need”. Sukmaantara agrees with what Hutchinson and Waters mean, what is the real use of language learning. As Sukmaantara says; group of learners who want to be waiters need to provide a target situation as follows: They need English for working in Restaurant, the emphasize is on speaking; the content could

be about welcoming, setting the customers' diners, taking orders, suggesting special cuisine, apologizing, etc.; and they will mostly and quite frequently serve native speakers English. (Sukmaantara, 1997)

It is very clear to get an idea how ESP based syllabus differs from general English syllabus. Here is One model lesson plan taken from Keith Harding (2007). The topic is for Engineering professionals. One of the subjects for Vocational course is also Civil Construction Technology. It says how to construct a Need based curriculum for professionals.

Model Lesson Plan: Renovation Project – based on ESP

Level	Pre-intermediate to Advanced
Time	30 – 40 minutes
Aim	Language of measurement and calculation; making suggestions and proposals.
Other	To practice numbers, dimensions, measurements and calculations in the context of a broader project
Sample Topic	Construction and building trades
Transfer	Activity can be transferred to any specialism where teamwork is important.
Materials	Photocopies of Report form – one per student; tape measures, rulers and calculators (optional)
Procedure 1 As a warmer and in order to check, the students can use the language of measurement and calculation, divide the class into pairs. One member of each pair should measure the dimensions of the room you are in as quickly as possible and using whatever equipment they	

have (ruler, paces, visuals) and then report back to their partner, dictating the dimensions. It is important that the measurer doesn't simply write down the measurement and give them to the partner, so monitor this carefully. Students compare answers.

2 Divide the class into four groups (or fewer if you have less than eight students). Give each group one of the following tasks for the building where they are studying.

- To replace all the windows
- To replace all the floorings
- To replace all the computers and IT equipment
- To replace all the furniture

3 Each group should fill in the Report form.

4 When the group have finished the task and prepared the reports, ask them to regroup with one member from each of the original groups and show their reports. The new groups should put together a full proposal for renovation of the building.

Variation: You can set different tasks. Some different tasks are suggested;

- a. Organizing a party to celebrate the 25th anniversary of your company (budget, timing schedule etc.)
- b. Arranging for a work experience teenager to come for a week (their schedule, the costs involved, etc.)

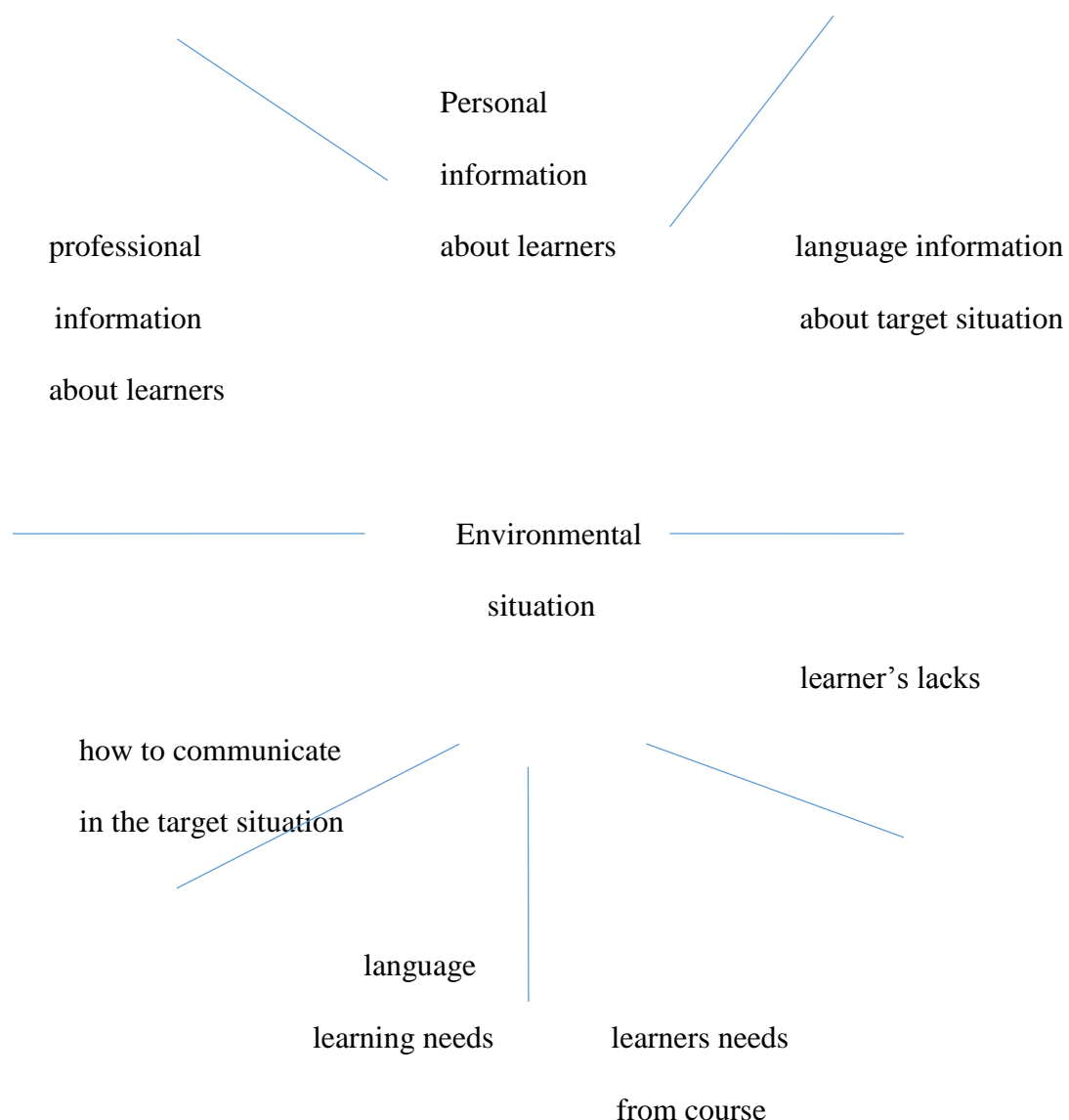
<p>Follow up</p> <p>Write up the renovation plans as a formal proposal, either as a letter plus report or an email plus report as attachment.</p>

Professionally qualified students are not working in their own places. Their workplace is different. They have to communicate with their workers, customers, employer and so on. A common language is needed. English being a global language it helps them to communicate with others. Hence for them communication is the main purpose in learning English. Each College or University needs to develop an ESP syllabus for each profession such as Medicine, Pharmacy, Business, Tourism etc., ESP covers a vast range of mostly wanted Vocational and professional areas.

7. Needs Analysis

Needs Analysis is the foundation of ESP. It is the basic need of the learner in the area of language skill. It analysis the student's needs, determines the objectives of the language learning. Select materials that meet the need of learner. Needs analysis is conducted prior to every programme. There are many components of needs analysis that need to consider. Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and Present Situation Analysis (PSA) are paramount important

factors to consider when we assess the language needs of the learners. In TSA we focus on the learner's language requirements in the occupational or academic situation whereas PSA estimates strength and weakness in language, skill and learning experiences. The students, the language teaching establishments, and the user- institutions are the basic sources of information for PSA. I take one model of needs analysis by Dudley – Evans & St. John (1998).



This need analysis model developed by Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) covers all areas of language requirements as we discussed, Target Analysis (TSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), etc. It emphasizes on the importance of flexibility of context when we implement this Method. Moreover, we need to consider what are the views of experts in the relevant field such as Learners, Sponsors, Subject-specialists, English Language Instructors and ESP practitioners to formulate ideas to develop this method. Need analysis requires some information about the learner's needs for the better understanding of the learner before what is going to implement in the classroom. Knowledge regarding the needs of the learner will help the expert to prepare a suitable curriculum in order to satisfy the need of the learner. It is the ideal step to prepare a need based materials for the learner. Customer Relationship Management is one of the Vocational subjects for Vocational student. The learner's need of the language here is to deal with customers. Language items suitable for this job is the need of the learner for this subject. If a well planned syllabus prepared based on the information mentioned here, it will definitely help the learner. Here current textbook with poetry and short story may not satisfy the basic need for this job market.

Bio Medical Equipment Technology, Physiotherapy, Polymer Technology, Textile Technology are some of the professional courses in the list of the course for Vocational Higher Secondary Course. Third Unit of the English course book for First year is one of the examples to say the English syllabus is not matching for the need. VHSE students need to be familiar with vocabulary and conversation practice related to the field like Medical Equipment Technology, Physiotherapy etc.

English Text book for *First year* (Unit -3) Vocational Higher Secondary Course

Unit – 3 Beyond the Horizon		
Title	Genre	Author

Sunrise on the Hills	Poem	H.W.Longfellow
The Trip of Le Haria	Short story	Guy de Maupassant
The Sacred Turtle of Kadavu	Travelogue	From a Fijian legend
Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.	Poem	Nissim Ezekiel

Activities following these literary works are given importance, partially referring to the grammar, giving more importance for writing and reading skills. All these selected works and activities do not consider professional needs of the learner.

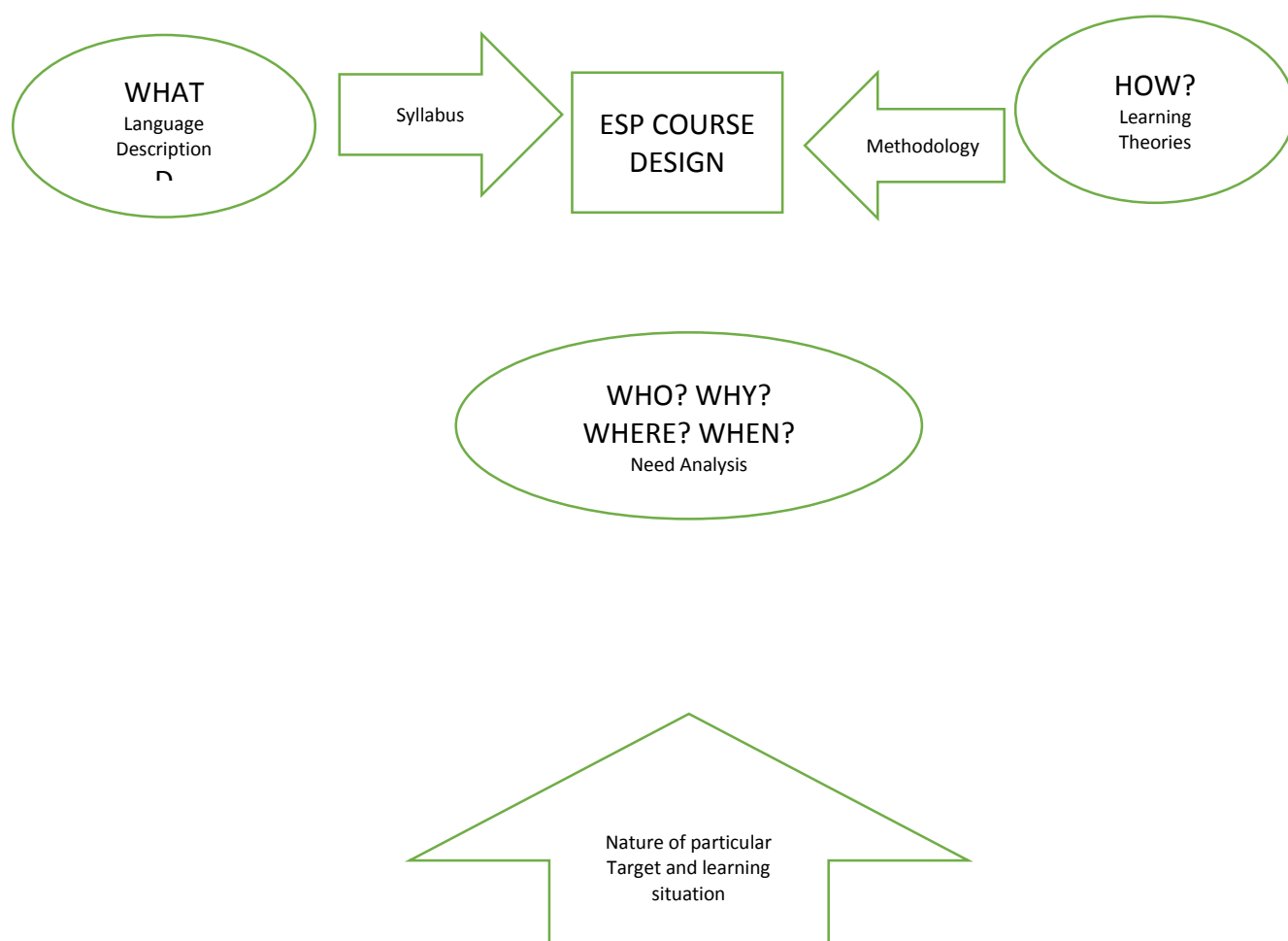
8. Methodology and Course Design based on ESP

There is not much difference in the methodology of ESP and General English. The methodology of ESP is designed for the requirements professionals. Hence importance is to achieve communicative skill and professional skill. The methodology of English for General purpose is on education and training.” ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching materials” (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, p.19) The meaning of methodology is the types of techniques employed to teach language skills and the role the techniques play in serving the student’s needs. ESP methodology is, as defined by Robinson (1991) by methodology he refers to what goes on in the classroom and to what students have to do. Using technical terms, it refers to classroom activities and techniques. Tasks, role play, simulations (ESP today, A Practitioner’s guide). ESP tasks given in teaching is focusing on linguistic and professional skills. The methodology of ESP and EGP is similar to a large extend. But the way the techniques applied in ESP classroom differs from EGP. The tailor made materials of ESP is to meet the need of job place comparing to the general text book prepared for general English teaching.

9. Course Design

Munby (1978) defines ESP as a course where “The syllabus and materials are determined in all the essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner”. The course and its purpose is vital important when we consider the syllabus, we prepare for the course. Vocational Higher Secondary Courses are for producing technical skilled manpower. Those who complete the course go to different workplaces in the various parts of the world. To equip them to face the challenges of communication in English, an appropriate plan of syllabus should be designed. Here we consider what are the factors that affect ESP Course Design designed by Hutchinson & Walters.

Factors Affecting ESP Course Design. (Hutchinson & Walters)



Analyzing VHSE English textbooks and syllabus in the light of ESP methodology and course design, it is clear that the text books prescribed for Vocational Higher Secondary course in the state of Kerala is not matching the factors affecting the course. The text book analysis in Needs analysis section of this paper has examined the basic requirements of the learner and the course book offered are not completely satisfying to the professional needs of the learner.

10. Role of Teacher in ESP classroom

English teacher in India usually is one who has been trained by General English methodology. In the state of Kerala English teacher and teaching materials are deeply rooted in literature tradition. Training of English teachers is in literature not in language teaching. Recently some noted changes can be found in the approach. In Higher Secondary Course in Kerala, Communicative English is an option with Journalism. Here also teacher who teaches communicative English is one who is trained to teach English literature. Teacher is not specially trained for teaching communicative English. This is the present scenario of English teaching in Kerala.

“Generally, ESP teachers are primarily the teachers of General English’(Stevens,1988; Ellis & Johnson, 1994)

In Vocational Higher Secondary classrooms, syllabus is based on literature and teacher is also trained for it, hence it is a challenge both for the teacher and for the learner to switch over to ESP context. Comparing to General English teacher ESP teacher needs more training and confidence to deal with the new language situation to guide the learner. As Stevens (1988) suggested there are three techniques for ESP teachers.

- Become familiar with ESP course materials
- Become familiar with the language of the subject
- Allow students to put you right

It is not an easy task to deal with ESP learning outcomes for a General English teacher. English teacher is one who is deeply conditioned by general English methodology. To switch over to ESP, teacher needs flexibility, patience and confidence. Moreover, the challenge they have to meet in the classroom is not comfortable in the beginning stage. According to Dudley Evans an ESP practitioner has five different roles to teach. They are;

1. Teacher
2. Course Designer and Material Provider
3. Researcher
4. Collaborator
5. Evaluator

English teacher is more responsible and they have to play the role of a Teacher, Course designer and Material provider, Researcher, Collaborator and as Evaluator simultaneously. Teacher knows what is needed for their learner. They can design the syllabus for their need and prepare materials. Teacher is always a researcher. They need to improve their knowledge regarding the course and related needs of the learners. Innovative methods need to be introduced. They are the best Collaborators. They are the best Evaluators. These roles of ESP teacher will help their learners to achieve their goals in education.

Conclusion

As Widdowson (1983) says ESP focuses on language 'use' rather than 'usage'. ESP curriculum emphasis on the important role of English language and the English teacher's pivotal role in the global market for professionals. Hence students need to acquire not only subject knowledge but must give equal importance for English communicative skill. At the same time, it is the responsibility of the government to revise the study materials for Vocational Higher Secondary Education of the state of Kerala at the earliest. They are studying Vocational

course in order to get a job and work as professionals. Professional need of the language cannot be ignored in this competitive world where education should support the learner with confidence. It should help him to get a job and lead a happy life.

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